

THE

# HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

January 2008

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

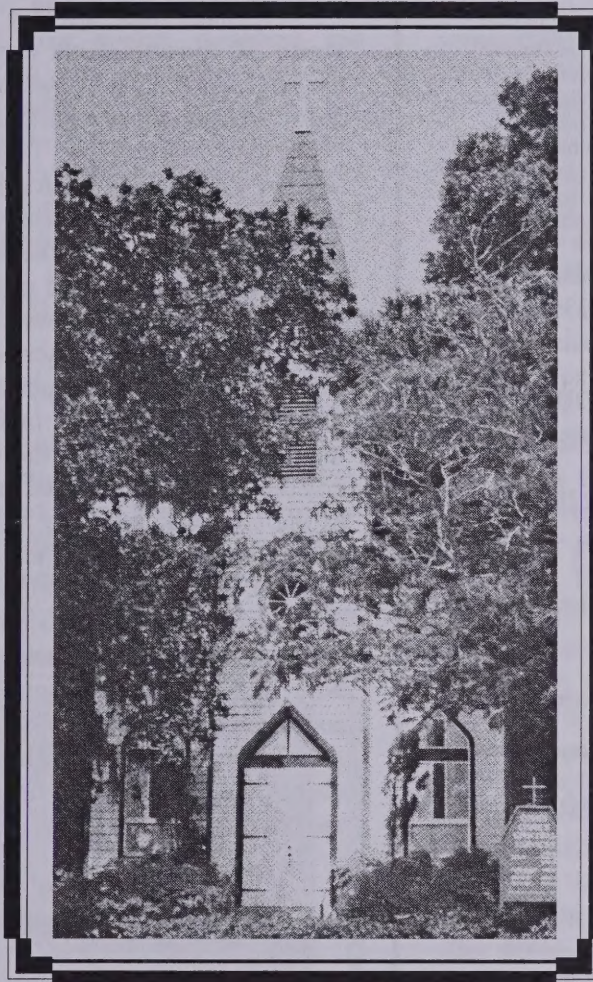
The January luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, January 17, 2008, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Program plans are being finalized as the newsletter goes to press. Reservations may be made by calling 467-4090. We really must insist that you call by noon on Wednesday, January 16, to assure your reservation and to help us plan seating which is limited to sixty people. The price of the lunch is \$7.00.

## MEMBERSHIP FEES

It's time to send in your membership dues for 2008. If you are unsure about whether your fees are due, check the date on your address label. This date is your expiration date. Prices are fifteen dollars (\$15) for an individual and twenty-five (\$25) for a household.

### PLEASE HELP!

We desperately need a committee of three or four people to be in charge of planning the menu and buying and preparing the food for our monthly luncheons. Prima Luke has begun a new business and will not be available any longer.



The original Christ Church was erected in 1890 on the corner of Boardman and North Beach Boulevard and moved to 226 North Beach Boulevard in the early 1900's. It was destroyed by Hurricane Camille on August 17, 1969.

## EARLY CHURCHES OF HANCOCK COUNTY

By  
Scott Bagley

Few things define an area as much as its churches. Hancock County is no exception with a number of its churches having long and rich histories. Limited space

precludes a look at all of them in one issue. Accordingly, we've chosen only one for this issue and will leave for future issues the opportunity to explore the interesting histories of other churches in the area.

### CHRIST CHURCH, EPISCOPAL

Shieldsborough, now known as Bay St. Louis, was the site where records show the very first Episcopal



THE

**HISTORIAN**

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
Linda-Lou Nelson, PublisherPublished monthly by the  
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**Email address:**

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**LOBRANO HOUSE  
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY  
10:00AM — 3:00PM  
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

services in Hancock County were held as far back as 1838, principally through the efforts of the Domestic Missionary Society. It was not until 1851, however, that regular services began when Bishop Green of the Diocese of Mississippi, assisted by the Rev. Thomas S. Savage of Pass Christian, confirmed two persons.

Soon thereafter a small group of communicants organized as St. Luke's Church which was soon recognized and admitted to the Diocese of Mississippi. Two years later in 1860, a church fronting the Bay was completed at a cost of two thousand dollars with the rectory constructed from donated materials. While the exact address is not known, early records described this first church as a “neat Gothic structure.” Sometime during or just after the Civil War, both the church and rectory were destroyed and title to the land was lost. By this time few communicants were left and in 1881 St. Luke's was dropped from the roll of diocesan parishes. The few parishioners remaining joined with Grace Church, a small Episcopal church located on Nicholson Avenue in Waveland. This small church was destroyed by fire during the late 1800's and closed.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF  
CHRIST CHURCH**

In spite of this less than encouraging early history and through the efforts of one Miss Hettie Crowell and the few remaining Episcopalians in the area, Christ Church was established in 1889. The first services were held in Miss Crowell's home on North Beach Boulevard. In 1890 the cornerstone for a new church was laid on North Beach Boulevard, adjacent to Boardman Avenue. Funds to build the new church were raised by children and adults alike through out-

door bazaars, plays, and ice cream socials—some of which were held under the oak trees on the grounds of the Pickwick Hotel on South Beach Boulevard. Among the first members of Christ Church, in addition to Miss Crowell, were Mrs. Kate Worsley, Miss Jennie Hunter, and the Aiken, Cowand, Von Gohren, Posey, and Delamain families. First known vestrymen were Judge Aiken, Charles Cowand, Dr. L. H. Von Gohren, and L. H. Von Gohren, Jr. The first wedding in the new church was that of Miss Paula Von Gohren and W. W. Jenks in November of 1891. Records reflect that the decorations for the day were chrysanthemums.

In 1901 Christ Church was admitted to the Diocese of Mississippi as a mission. The location proved to be remote, making it hard for parishioners to attend services. Accordingly, a few years later, the church was moved on rollers down Dunbar Avenue to what was deemed a more central location—the corner of North Beach Boulevard and Carroll Avenue. This new location was purchased from the late Mrs. Walter Gex, Sr., and Mr. Charles G. Moreau. Helen Chapman (later Helen Penrose), a young parishioner at the time, remembered riding with the church as it made its way to its new location. By this time other families had been added to the membership rolls, including, in addition to the Chapman family, the Horton, de Montluzin, Wisner, Power, Firshing, Harris, Crawford, Penn, Pepperdene, Penrose, Capdepon, Briggs, Norman, Thurston and Williams families. In later years a parish house annex to the church was built.

Consecration of Christ Church occurred on July 8, 1913. Various priests-in-charge served the church during its first fifty years. Many of these priests-in-charge lived in Pass Christian



where they also served Trinity Episcopal Church. These priests-in-charge would hold services in the Pass on Sunday morning, come by train in the afternoon, and after services at Christ Church return by train late at night. Dedicated lay readers during this period included E. E. Lucas, who served during the flu epidemic of 1918, Richard Shadoin, and Phillip Allison.

### FIRST RECTOR

In 1948 The Reverend Charles R. Johnson came from Jackson, Mississippi, as priest-in-charge of the mission. In 1950, with 134 registered communicants, Christ Church was granted parish status, and Father J. (as Reverend Johnson was affectionately known) became its first rector. In that same year he began a nursery (Christ Episcopal Day School) with seventeen students and Mrs. W. E. Bartram as the first teacher. The school grew each year as the students progressed until a high school was

needed.

The following year the seven and one-half acre Wisner estate property at 912 South Beach Boulevard was purchased for a school-church complex. The Wisner main house became the rectory, and the large carriage house became the school. In 1956 a new brick school building was completed, and in 1962 the McCulloch wing was added, doubling the school's size. Brick residences were built for the rector and the curate in 1966 and 1968 respectively. In 1969 the Coast Episcopal High School was established in Pass Christian.

### HURRICANE CAMILLE

On August 17, 1969, Hurricane Camille destroyed Christ Church along with Coast Episcopal High School in Pass Christian. Items retrieved from the destroyed church included the baptismal font, a twisted cross, a mother of pearl and silver baptismal shell, brass

altar rails, some crushed altar chairs, and fragments from the stained glass windows. The parish decided to rebuild the church on the front of the property at 912 South Beach Boulevard. The Wisner house at the front of the property was moved to 918 South Beach Boulevard. For twenty months the congregation met for services in the day school toward the back of the property, using a portable altar and organ. On April 18, 1971, the new church was dedicated and the surviving twisted cross was placed atop the baptismal font. The altar chairs were eventually repaired by Father J. and placed in the new altar area and the stained glass fragments were incorporated into some new stained glass doors. The new church was a one story gable-roofed church with a separate parish hall (named Virginia Hall) and a free standing bell tower.

In February of 1984, Father J. retired after thirty-five years as the first rector of Christ Church. In August 1985, the Reverend Arthur E. Johnson was inducted as the second rector of Christ Church. During his tenure, the day school was moved to Pass Christian and collocated with Coast Episcopal High School. The second Reverend Johnson served until 2003 at which time an interim rector, the Reverend Kyle Dice Seage, was appointed for a period of two years. Two months after the end of this interim appointment and during the search process for a new rector, Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005.

### HURRICANE KATRINA

With the exception of the free standing bell tower, all Christ Church buildings, including the rectory and curate's house, were totally destroyed. Also destroyed was the original day school building as well as the old carriage house. The communion silver and church ser-



Christ Church rebuilt at 912 South Beach Boulevard in 1971





Remains of Christ Church, destroyed by Hurricane Katrina  
on August 29, 2005

vice records had been removed before the storm, but the twisted cross and baptismal shell, saved following Hurricane Camille, were lost. Fragments of the stained glass windows, as well as the old brass altar rails, were retrieved. While the facility loss was immense, many of the old live oak trees that populated the church property survived as did all of the markers for the memorial garden at the front of the property.

In spite of the total devastation at the church and in the community, on the first Sunday following the storm, seventeen parishioners gathered for worship and communion on the sanctuary slab. The Reverend Charles Culpepper of Jackson, Mississippi, and the son-in-law of Father J., officiated.

After several months of services on the slab and later under a tent in the parking lot, a metal Quonset hut was constructed on the original sanctuary slab. This hut, where worship services are currently held, was built with the help of a number

of Episcopal churches in the southeast. In January 2006, the Reverend Elizabeth Wheatley-Jones was appointed by Bishop Duncan Gray as interim rector for Christ Church.

As before, the parishioners of Christ Church have looked to the future and plans for a new church near the footprint of the old church are progressing. The live oaks still thrive and the Gulf view remains breathtaking providing a perfect place for Christ Church to begin the next chapter of its rich history.

*(Portions of this article were taken from the pamphlet published for the dedication of the new church building at 912 South Beach Boulevard following Hurricane Camille. The author wishes to thank Emily and Lorraine de Montluzin, Nanette Stroh, Mary Winnard and Martha Keane for their gracious assistance with some of the more interesting details in the article.)*

## NEW WEBSITE

The Hancock County Historical Society has a new website. Marianne Pluim has kindly donated hours and hours of her time to establish a new and more user-friendly site for members and other visitors to use. Although it is still under construction, some pages are presently accessible, and others will be added as soon as possible. Check the site often for continuous updates. The new address is [www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com).

## BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

*Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years*  
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A nostalgic keepsake of the city's history including descriptions and pictures of many of the historic buildings and houses especially those along Beach Boulevard prior to Katrina

*Holly*  
By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)  
An intriguing anthology of tales of a tomcat living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

*Katrina Cookbook*  
By Chorlet Russell (\$19.95)  
A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

*Mississippi's No-Man's Land*  
By Marco Giardino, Ph.D., and Russell Guerin (\$10.95)  
A collection of letters of the Koch family, early settlers of Hancock County

*One Dog, Two Dogs, Three Dogs, Four...*  
By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)  
Twice told tales of several dogs living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

*Sink or Be Sunk*  
By Paul La Violette (\$30.00)  
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## INSTALLATION OF 2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

By  
Eddie Coleman

The installation of the 2008 Board of Directors of the Hancock County Historical Society was held at the Kate Lobrano House at noon on Thursday, December 6, 2007. Executive Director, Charles Gray, officiated at the brief ceremony and presented each officer with a certificate to commemorate his term of service. Society member and pianist Pat Ellmer provided seasonal music at the jazz brunch.

Serving the first half of his two-year term as president is retired Air Force JAG Officer Scott Bagley. Local attorney Edward Gibson serves the second half of a two-year term as first vice president. Jean Ann Thriffiley, Bay St. Louis businesswoman, begins the first half of her two-year term as



2008 Board of Directors

Standing L to R: Ames Kergosien, Barbara Warner, Linda-Lou Nelson, Jean Ann Thriffiley, Scott Bagley

Seated: Charles Gray

Not Pictured: Edward Gibson, Zita Waller, and Ellis Cuevas

second vice president, and continuing as secretary is local artist Zita Waller. Entrepreneur and businesswoman Linda-Lou Nelson joins the board to begin her two-year term as publicity chairperson. Completing the board are Ellis Cuevas, Publisher Emeritus of the *Sea Coast Echo*, as membership

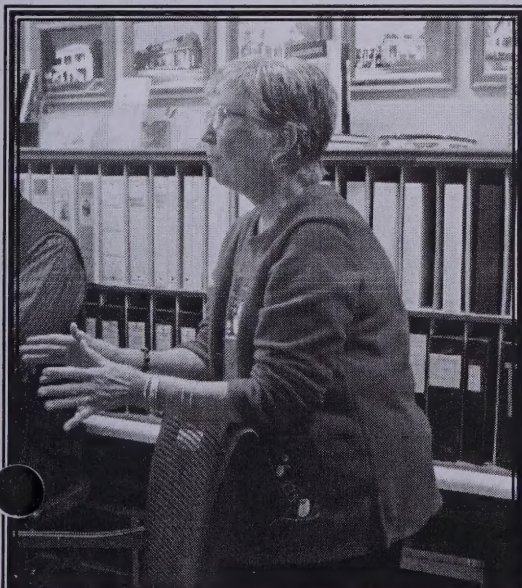
chairman and realtor/appraiser Ames Kergosien as historian.

## RENOVATIONS TO LOBRANO HOUSE

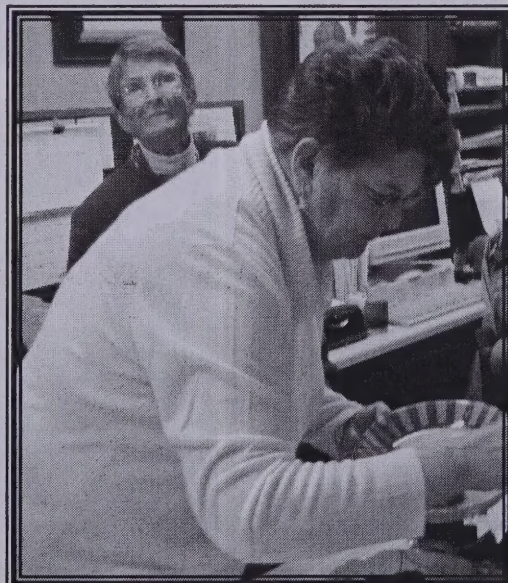
By Eddie Coleman

Visitors to the Kate Lobrano House and Society members who have dropped by have noticed striking changes to the inside of the receiving and work areas of the building. New carpet has been installed, and Charles worked diligently and painstakingly painting the rooms a fresh, soft sage green.

The computer work areas have been relocated from the south wall to the north wall. Gone are the well-worn work tables which once crowded the research area. These have been replaced with solid walnut tables and antique chairs which present a much more



Pat Ellmer, who provided music at the Jazz Brunch

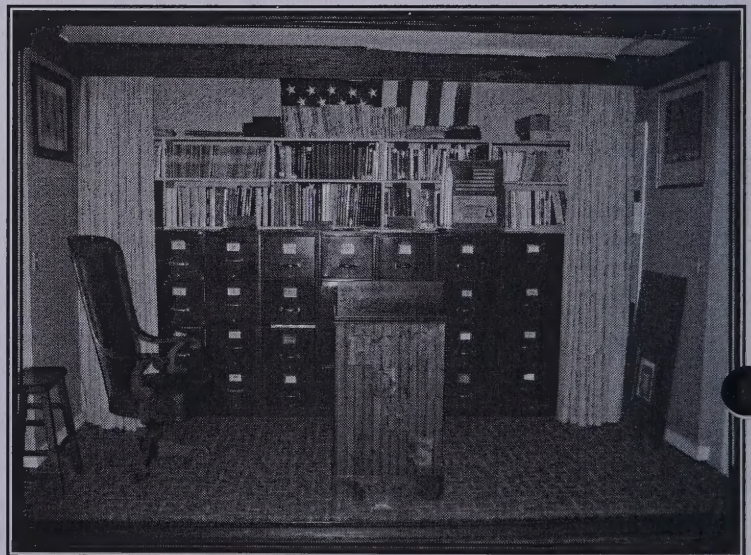
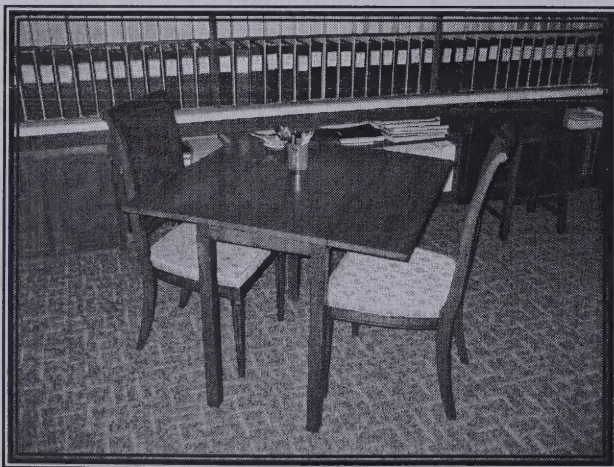
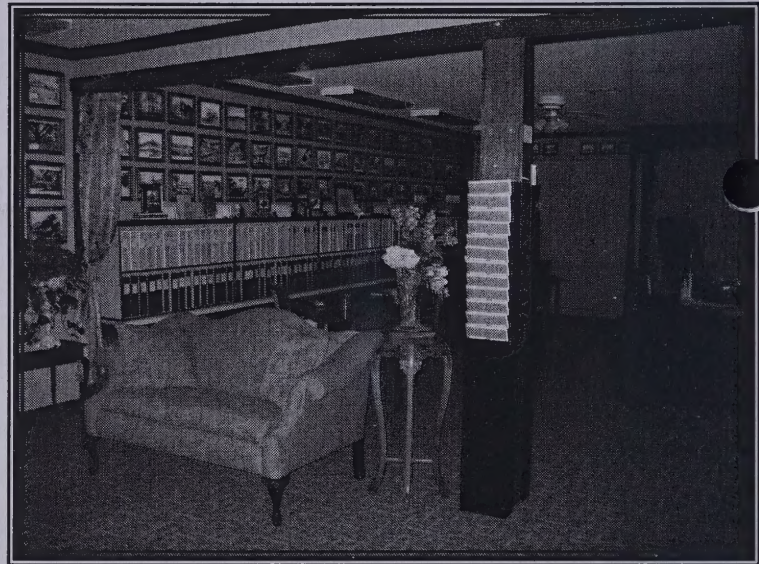
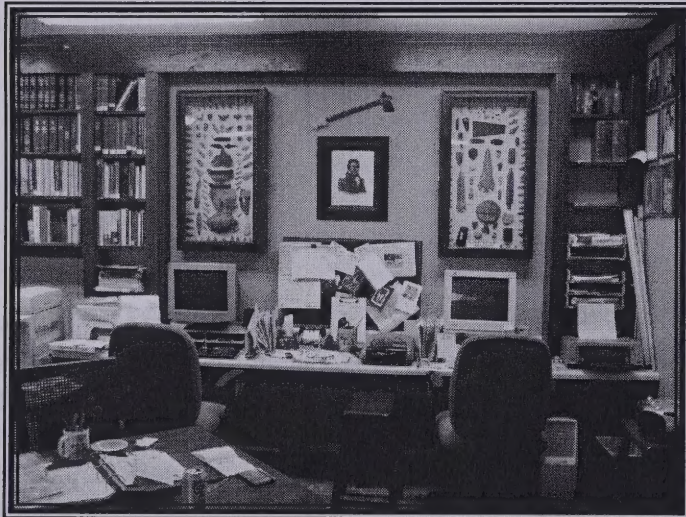


Mary Zimmerman replenishing the food table with Pat Cucculu peeking over her shoulder.



pleasing work station.

Continuing renovations will include the front room museum and landscaping of the yard.





We are in desperate need of typists and photographers to help us catalogue the vast amount of information we have in the society. Any time you can donate is appreciated. Please call 467-4090 to volunteer.



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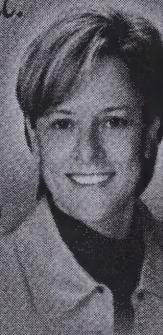
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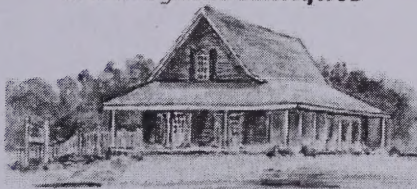
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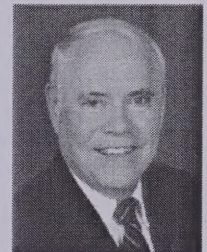
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